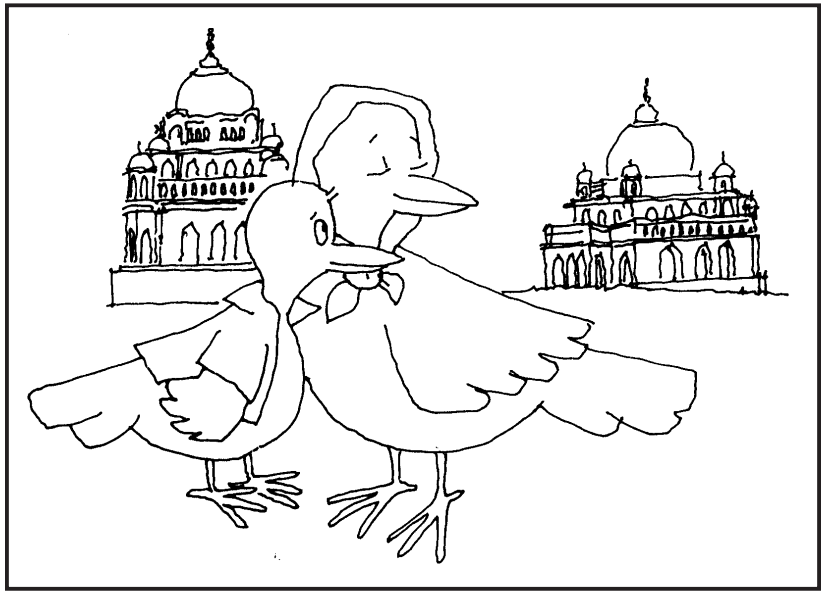
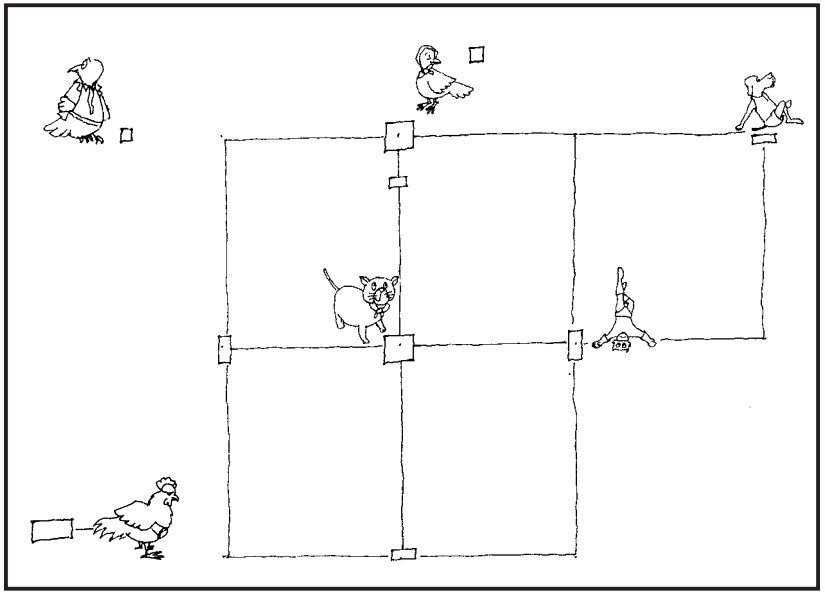
Neeta Das

Where is my mother?



Illustrated by
Shubhrajit Das
2007



Sketch plan of Kaiserbagh Palace

Created, written, and designed by Neeta Das

Published by
Mansara, Historical Society of Lucknow
D-4, Balaji Houses, Birbal Sahani Marg, Lucknow-226 007
www.mansara.org
Rs. 25.00

Neeta Das

Where is my mother?

(For animal loving Tania)

Illustrated by
Shubhrajit Das
First Printed 2004

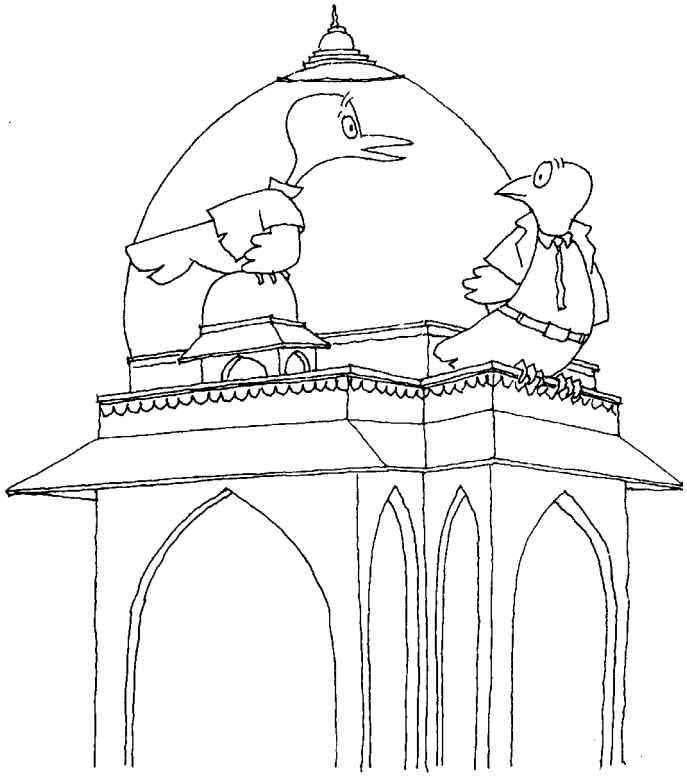
Ghu-Ghu, a beautiful white baby pigeon was flying homewards with its family and friends. They were all chatting and flapping their wings gleefully when suddenly the sky turned a nasty gray and a dust storm approached. The group of birds quickly moved towards a nearby mango tree. Most of the older pigeons reached the tree safely. However, the smaller pigeons got left behind, as they could not fly as fast as the older ones.

When it started raining the baby birds, including Ghu-Ghu dived towards a nearby bush to take shelter. They waited there for the storm to pass away. When the skies cleared they quickly flew towards the mango tree where they had seen their friends and family moving. But alas, they couldnít find them anywhere. They flew around and searched and searched. Ghu- Ghu by now had become very tired and had also started missing his mother. He was nearly in tears.

Suddenly Ghu-Ghu and his friends saw Kallu, the crow sitting on a nearby tree. Ghu-Ghu approached the crow and asked him if he had seen a group of pigeons. Indeed, he had, replied the crow. He also said that he had heard the pigeons talking that they could not wait any longer for the young ones, as it was getting dark.

They had to reach Kaiserbagh in Lucknow before night time. The crow also pointed out the general direction in which the pigeons including Ghu-Ghuís mother had flown.

Feeling a little better at this news, Ghu-Ghu thanked the crow and gathering his friends decided to find Kaiserbagh where he hoped to find his mother. After resting the night, they set out in the morning and from time to time they would take directions from passerbyís.



Finally, Ghu-Ghu saw a large garden with lots of trees in it. In the middle, he saw a beautiful shelter. Tia, a small parrot was sitting on it. Ghu-Ghu went and sat on the white chatri next to Tia. ìExcuse me, is this Kaiserbagh?î Ghu-Ghu asked the little bird.

ìWhy do you ask?î the parrot said looking a little startled, as it had not seen the pigeon approach.

ì You see, I have lost my mother and a crow told me that she had gone to Kaiserbagh,î Ghu-Ghu replied

ìNo, this is not Kaiserbagh. This is the Begum Hazrat Mahal park. You should try the Mermaid gate, because that is where Kaiserbagh starts,î Tia said.

ìHow will I recognize the place?î Ghu-Ghu asked.

ì Well, that gate has figures of two mermaids on it. But be careful of the dogs there. They are always there hunting around for leftover bones from the food stalls around,î the parrot cautioned.

Thanking the bird, Ghu-Ghu flew to the Mermaid gate. He sighted the dogs before he saw the mermaids. The dogs eyed the little bird suspiciously. Ghu-Ghu saw Bhondu, an old black dog basking in the sun a little distance away. Perching itself safely on a high wall, Ghu-Ghu said meekly, ìExcuse me, sir, is this Kaiserbagh?î

ìNo,î the dog grunted sleepily.

ìI have lost my mother and Tia said you could help me,î Ghu-Ghu persisted.

ìThis is the Press club today. It used to be the entrance gate of Kaiserbagh, *Jilaun Khana,*î Bhondu replied briefly, ìAsk Stinky the bat at the Lakhi gate.î

Bhondu went back to sleep. Ghu-Ghu realized he could not get much out of this sleepy head so he went off in search of Stinky. He reached a large gate like structure. A foul smell was coming from there. Ghu-Ghu knew this had to be Stinkyís home. He went in and saw Stinky dangling upside down from the roof.

ì Stinky,î Ghu-Ghu called softly. Now bats donít

like being woken up during the day, but Ghu-Ghu did not know that.

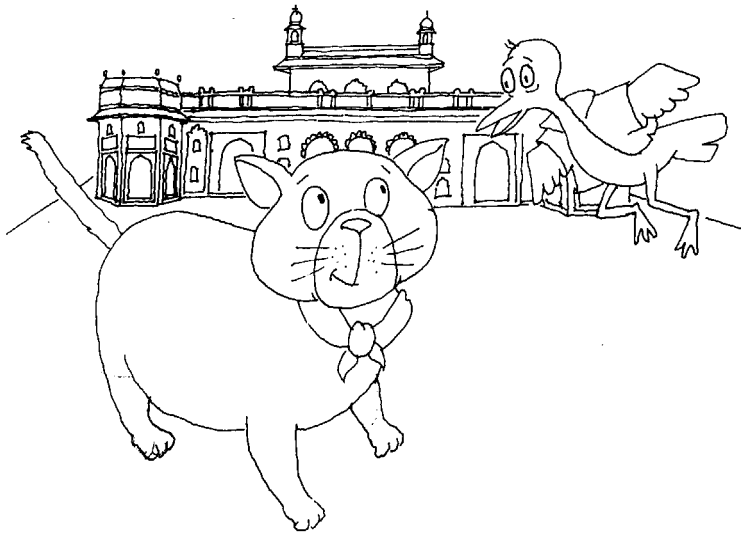
ìWho is it and what do you mean by rudely waking me up like this,î Stinky shouted, flapping its wings wildly and flying around in circles, totally blinded by daylight.

ìItís me, Ghu-Ghu,î Ghu-Ghu answered meekly. He was very afraid of this weird animal like bird.

ìI have lost my mother. Kallu said she had gone to Kaiserbagh, and Bhondu said you would know something.î

ìBhondu, that good for nothing fellow,î Stinky snorted. ìHe just sleeps the whole day and is too lazy even to talk. Go ask someone else.î

Leaving the gate Ghu-Ghu saw a large white building. He flew towards it. On the court in front of the building was Firangi, a fat white cat. Firangi eyed the small pigeon as it flew towards it. His mouth started watering. He wondered how he could catch the little bird. Much to his delight the bird flew straight towards him and sat down on the low wall.



ìI am Ghu-Ghu. I have lost my mother. Kallu said she has gone to Kaiserbagh. Tia said Kaiserbagh was near the Mermaid gate. But Bhondu there said it was not. Stinky at the Lakhi gate was very rude and would

not help me. Will you help me find my mother,î Ghu-Ghu asked Firangi.

ì Yes, yes, I will. You have come to the right person,î said Firangi trying to befriend his prey. ìThis is the Sufaid Baradari. It is only a small part of the large complex, which is called Kaiserbagh palace. Nawab Wajid Ali Shah had made this complex in 1850. Alas, most of the palace was destroyed after the war in 1857. Earlier this stood in the center of Paree Khana, with a large char-bagh surrounded by stately buildings; Lanka and Chaulakhi to name a few. The twin entrance gates to this garden, Lakhi gates, still exist. They cost one-lakh rupees each, hence, the name. In the gardens around these building the Nawab Wajid Ali Shah used to have a mela. There used to be much singing and dancing there. The palace complex also had many palaces of the Nawab. The twin gate of Lakhi leads to the Kaiser Pasand.î

Ghu-Ghu learnt a lot about the Kaiserbagh palace but nothing much about its mother. He was getting tired and a little impatient.

ìBut where is my mother?î He asked impatiently.

ìNow let me see,î said Firangi thinking of ways to catch the bird. But just then a man came out from inside the baradari. Seeing him the cat hurriedly ran away leaving the bird with no information about his mother.

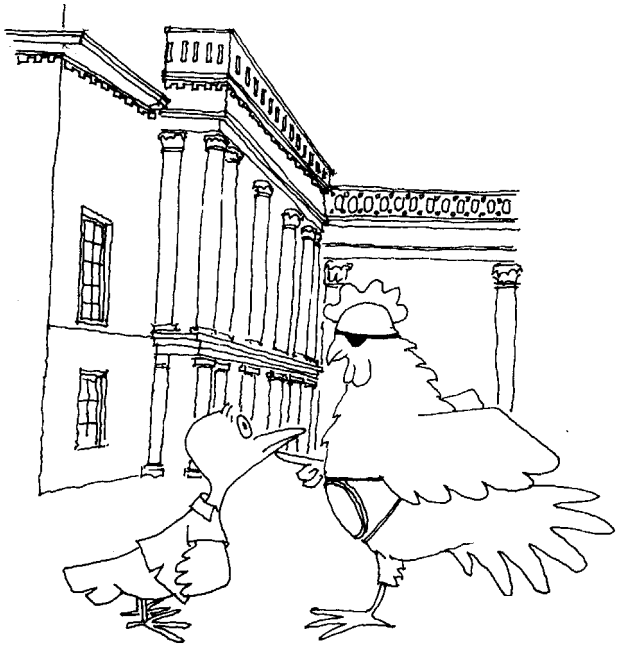
The tired bird flew towards the second Lakhi gate. Then remembering Firangiís mention of Kaiser Pasand he searched around and saw Fighter, the cock. Fighter was trying to peck at another cock goading it to fight when it saw Ghu-Ghu approaching it.

ìGood afternoon, sir,î Ghu-Ghu said.

ìGood afternoon,î replied the cock. ìHow may I help you?î

ìI am Ghu-Ghu. I have lost my mother. Kallu said she had gone to Kaiserbagh. Tia said Kaiserbagh was near the Mermaid gate. But Bhondu there said it was not. Stinky at the Lakhi gate was very rude and would not help me. Firangi told me that Sufaid Baradari was an important part of Kaiserbagh but did not know where my mother was. Will you help me find my mother, î Ghu-Ghu asked Fighter.

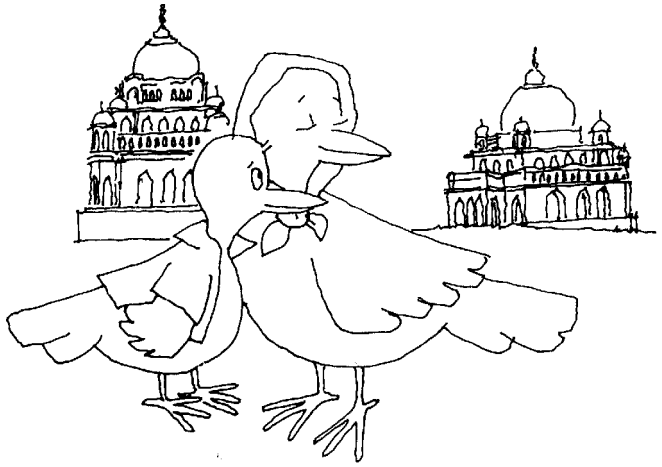
ì Yes, I would love to,î replied Fighter, ìBut this is not Kaiserbagh.î



ìThis is Kaiser Pasand. It was made by Roshan-ud-daula, a minister of Nasir-ud-din Haider, but like Chaulakhi Wajid Ali Shah confiscated this kothi when he made the palace complex and renamed it *Kaiser Pasand*. One of his favorite ladies, Nawab Mashuq Mahal, used to reside there. But I have not seen any pigeons here. You could try the tombs of Saadat Ali Khan and his wife Begum Khurshidzadi. I have seen many tourists feeding pigeons over there,î Fighter informed Ghu-Ghu.

Ghu-Ghu was by now nearly in tears. He thanked the cock and flew towards the two tombs. And to his

delight he saw the garden surrounding the tombs full of pigeons. He quickly flew towards it and searched for his mother. He saw her sitting in a corner, looking very sad. But seeing Ghu-Ghu she flew straight towards him. The mother and son sat down for a long conversation.

ìWhere were you son, and how did you get here?î His mother asked.

ì We got lost in the rain. Kallu said you had gone to Kaiserbagh. Tia said Kaiserbagh was near the Mermaid gate. But Bhondu there said it was not. Stinky at the Lakhi gate was very rude and would not help me. Firangi told me that Sufaid Baradari was an important part of Kaiserbagh but did not know where you were. Then Fighter helped me find you,î Ghu-Ghu talking nineteen to a dozen. His mother did not understand much but she was happy to have Ghu-Ghu back with her.